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G-2 CONTRIBUTION TO N.I.E.-35:  
INDOCHINA: CURRENT SITUATION AND PROBABLE DEVELOPMENTS

I. The Current Military Situation in Indochina

French and Associated States Position

a. Strength

The French Ground Forces in Indochina (FTEO) number 150,500, and are composed as follows:

French	34,000
Foreign Legion	21,000
North African	29,000
Senegalese	15,000
Indochinese	50,000
Miscellaneous	1,500

The Armed Forces of the Associated States number 50,000, distributed among the three States, as follows:

Vietnam	38,500
Cambodia	7,500
Laos	4,000

The above French and Associated States regular forces are supported by 70,000 native auxiliary troops and 80,000 semi-military forces, such as plantation guards, railroad guards, etc.

b. Dispositions and Organization of French and Associated States

Regular Forces

Tonkin	79,500	(2 light Divs, 1 Armored Regt, 1 Ind Mobile Group, and 42 Battalion-sized units)
Annam	30,500	(26 Battalion-sized units)
Cochin-China	64,000	(48 Battalion-sized units)
Laos	12,000	(9 Battalion-sized units)
Cambodia	14,500	(10 Battalion-sized units)
TOTAL	200,500	

\*Army and State Dept reviews completed\*

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All French and Associated States Armed Forces in Indochina are under the operational command of the Commander-in-Chief of French Armed Forces, Far East.

In Tonkin, where the principal French strength is located, the French have grouped for purposes of tactical coordination, some 30 battalion-sized units into two light divisions. Each division, composed of three mobile groups (regimental combat team equivalents), has an armored squadron, an artillery battalion, and engineer and signal units attached. These groups, together with an independent mobile group and an independent Airborne Group of four parachute battalions, have proved to be effective as mobile reserve forces, supporting the remaining 38 battalion-sized units and one Armored Regiment located principally within the defensive perimeter in Tonkin.

Elsewhere in Indochina, the French strength is not sufficient to form large-size reserve groups, and the majority of the combat units occupy static defense posts, although in each of the territorial sectors, one or two battalions may function as a reserve.

c. Combat Effectiveness

The French have received relatively large amounts of aid through NDAP, much of it earmarked for the Armies of the Associated States. The timely receipt of certain items, such as aircraft, napalm bombs and ammunition, has proved of much value to the French forces, especially in recent battles.

The arrival in Indochina in mid-December 1950 of General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, Commander-in-Chief of French Armed Forces Far East, and High Commissioner to Indochina, has spectacularly raised the morale of the French forces. Through his vigorous efforts, the mood of defeatism has been dispelled, and the French forces have been infused with a new will-to-fight.

The new spirit in the French forces and the material and troop reinforcements which are arriving have most certainly raised the combat effectiveness of the French to a new high.

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d. Likely Changes in The French and Associated States Military  
Position During the Next Six Months

During the fiscal year 1951, the French and Vietnamese Ground Forces in Indochina are to receive \$55,000,000 in MDAF, plus a supplemental amount of \$111,200,000. Materiel to be shipped includes signal, armored, engineer, and medical equipment, ammunition, and POL. Unit equipment for 30 infantry battalions, and various other artillery, engineer, ordnance and miscellaneous units will be supplied together with maintenance items for motor transport, engineer, artillery, signal and medical units already existing. This materiel is now arriving and the rate of arrival should increase during the next six months.

The French Government agreed in March 1951 to send reinforcements to Indochina. Latest reports indicate that these reinforcements will number 15,000 to 20,000, including four organized infantry battalions. One battalion of reinforcements has already arrived, and a substantial portion of the total number should be in Indochina within the next six months.

The build-up of the Vietnamese Army will continue. Native officers and non-commissioned officers are being graduated from training schools in increasing numbers. Associated States units now being formed and equipped are to be given the mission of pacifying relatively quiet areas, thus relieving regular French forces for offensive operations.

The French, feeling that their military position is improving, are reportedly planning to undertake a major offensive in Tonkin at the first opportunity after the end of the rainy season sometime in September.

Viet Minh Position

a. Strength

The over-all strength of the Viet Minh regular Army is 120,000. This force is supported by 40,000 Regional militia troops and 85,000 irregulars.

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~~SECRET~~b. Dispositions and Organization of Regular Forces

Tonkin	85,000	(5 Divs, 11 Regts, 19 Bns, and misc dets)
Annam	12,000	(7 Regts, and misc dets)
Cochin-China	12,000	(4 Regts, 1 Bn, and misc dets)
Laos	5,000	(8 Bns, and misc dets)
Cambodia	6,000	(4 Regts and misc dets)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>120,000</b>	

The five Viet Minh divisions in Tonkin, with about 10,000 troops each, are concentrated around the French perimeter. These units contain the principal effective combat strength of the Viet Minh Armed Forces.

The remaining Viet Minh units are spread throughout Indochina, giving the Viet Minh control over northern Tonkin, major portions of the Annam coast, and parts of Cochin-China and Cambodia.

The Viet Minh do not have a Navy or Air Force.

c. Combat Effectiveness

The Viet Minh regular forces are well trained, experienced in guerrilla-type operations, and have rigid discipline under fanatical leaders.

Viet Minh staff planning, however, has failed to coordinate attacks over wide areas, which would have prevented French concentration of their mobile reserves; Viet Minh artillery support has been limited; there has been almost no defense against French air attacks, particularly those involving the use of napalm. Reports have indicated Viet Minh concern with the formation and equipping of anti-aircraft units, but little actual progress in this field is believed to have been made. Without anti-aircraft artillery or a small combat air arm, the Viet Minh, who are capable of passive defense measures only, can avoid French air attacks only in times of unfavorable weather.

In recent fighting in Tonkin, the Viet Minh have received considerably more casualties than the French without any gain in their military position. There are indications that these losses and the absence of a military success have caused a drop in morale, both in the Viet Minh High Command and troops in the line.

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d. Present Chinese Communist Assistance to the Viet Minh

Although small numbers of technical personnel, including air force and tank personnel, continue to receive training in China, the Chinese Communists have ceased training major Viet Minh units there. Some 5,000 Chinese Communist advisers and technical personnel, however, are now believed to be in Indochina training and advising the Viet Minh Armed Forces.

The Chinese Communists continue to supply the Viet Minh with ammunition, infantry weapons, and some artillery. It is believed that armor has not been supplied in any quantity. These arms are transported across the Sino-Indochinese border, now controlled by the Viet Minh from Lao Kay east to Dinh Lap, and by sea principally from Hainan Island to the Annam coast.

There is evidence that during December 1950 the Chinese Communists' supply program may have been halted temporarily, but shipments of military supplies were resumed by the end of the year. The present level of supply appears to be slightly less, especially in critical heavy items, than that at the beginning of the year.

e. Likely Changes in the Viet Minh Military Position Within the Next Six Months

The effective size of the Viet Minh Armed Forces depends largely on the available armament, and the scale of their military efforts depends on the availability of ammunition and other logistical items. Since current Viet Minh armament and ammunition come largely from the Chinese Communists, major changes in the Viet Minh military position will probably depend in large measure upon future Chinese Communist assistance.

During the rainy season from May to September, the Viet Minh, if they do not choose to launch heavy attacks, will certainly have an opportunity to further train and organize their major combat units, and also to store supplies, while their auxiliary forces and guerrilla troops harass the French. (Recent reports indicate that the Viet Minh may intensify their guerrilla-type warfare.) This resting, refitting, and resupplying should strengthen their military position by the end of the summer.

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The Viet Minh are regrouping their forces in Tonkin for possible further attacks on the French defense perimeter. Increased Viet Minh guerrilla activity has broken out in all parts of Indochina. The French have recently undertaken several local clearing operations with reportedly good results. Except for an incursion by a reported Chinese Communist battalion in northwest Tonkin, there have been no firm reports of Chinese Communist troops intervening.

II. Viet Minh's Prospects for Securing Indochina Without Large-scale Intervention by Chinese Communist Forces

From the military point of view it seems highly unlikely that the Viet Minh alone could secure Indochina.

After receiving a considerable amount of equipment, training, and military advice from the Chinese Communists since early 1950, the Viet Minh, during the first four months of 1951, launched two large-scale attacks against the French in Tonkin. The Viet Minh were defeated in both of these attacks.

Continued Chinese Communist logistic support together with technical and advisory aid will certainly strengthen the Viet Minh, but this increased strength will be relative to the improved position of the French forces as a result of the logistic aid which they are receiving and will continue to receive through MDAP.

III. French and Vietnamese Prospects for Ultimate Success Against the Viet Minh, Assuming No Direct Chinese Communist Intervention Occurs

It is believed that the security of continental France and North Africa would be endangered and that the French would be unable to meet their commitments in the defense of Western Europe if they should increase substantially their military commitments in Indochina above those already decided upon.

Expansion plans call for a Vietnamese National Army of 100,000 regulars, organized into three infantry divisions and one mountain division. Training

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schools are producing 250 officers and 800 NCOs a year. Other NCOs are being trained within units at the rate of 1,200 per year. Specialists such as drivers, mechanics, radio operators, etc., are being trained at five schools in Indochina. Some Vietnamese officers are receiving combat training in French units prior to their service in the Vietnamese Army.

MDAP equipment is arriving in large quantities to supply the French-Vietnamese forces. Pending the arrival of MDAP equipment for artillery, engineer, and service units, the French are permitting Vietnamese specialists selected for these units to train with like units of the French Army.

In connection with the formation of a Vietnamese National Army, it should be noted that until the Vietnamese gain confidence in French efforts to prepare them for actual independence, the morale and effectiveness of this army cannot be expected to be high.

The present Vietnamese Government under the leadership of Prime Minister Tran Van Huu is considered too pro-French to have popular appeal. Many Vietnamese, including Bao Dai, Chief of State, reportedly feel that the French are not giving the Vietnamese the freedom of political and military action which had been promised.

As the military position of the French improves, it seems likely that the French regime in Indochina may tend to limit further the political freedom and military autonomy of the Vietnamese. This would directly affect the morale and operation of the Vietnamese Army and hinder the joint efforts against the common enemy.

Generally, the French military position in Indochina has improved considerably in recent months, as a result of increased MDAP aid, a new aggressive leadership, improved morale, promised reinforcements, and a growing Vietnamese Army.

Barring direct Chinese Communist intervention, the French are believed not only capable of holding the Delta area in Tonkin, but also of further

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extending their areas of control. In other parts of Indochina, they can be expected to hold their present areas of control and continue to undertake clearing operations against the Viet Minh. It is not believed, however, that they will be able to eliminate totally Viet Minh resistance by purely military methods in the foreseeable future.

IV. Chinese Communist Capabilities To Intervene Effectively in Indochina

Approximately 200,000 Chinese Communist Field Force troops are located within 250 miles of the Indochinese border. Of this number, the Chinese Communists are capable of sparing 100,000 troops for intervention in Indochina, while continuing their bandit suppression campaign in South and Southwest China.

The initial increment of such an invasion force might possibly be the "Anti-French Volunteer Army," a joint Sino-Viet Minh force already reportedly organized for the purpose of assisting the Viet Minh. This force, estimated at 30,000, is believed to be composed of small units withdrawn from various formations in the border area, such as regular Field Force units, irregular border groups of mixed Sino-Viet Minh origin, and elements of former Nationalist units.

Large-scale Chinese Communist intervention (on the order of 100,000 troops, equipped and supplied for sustained operations) probably would result in a drastic contraction of the French defense zone in Tonkin, although the French should be able to hold the Haiphong beachhead. Intervention on a limited scale (on the order of 30,000 troops), committed over a period of time, would result in heavy battles in Tonkin, but the French should be able to hold most of their defensive zone.

It is believed that the Korean campaign has not cut off the movement of military supplies to South and Southwest China, although the quantities involved may have declined. The Chinese Communists could probably increase their logistic support to the Viet Minh, but, under present conditions, not

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to the extent necessary to give the Viet Minh a decisive military victory in Indochina. Although the transportation network is poor, it is probable that the Chinese Communists could maintain a flow of supplies into Indochina sufficient to sustain 100,000 troops, at least for a short period of time.

Reports indicate that the railroad from Central China has been extended from Lichou to Nanning (150 miles from the Tonkin-China frontier). Other reports indicate that this railroad is being extended as far as the frontier itself. Logistic problems would, however, remain difficult, especially during the rainy season in Tonkin, from May to September, both over the mountain supply routes and in the Delta.

It is believed that the continuing commitments in Korea, Chinese domestic problems, and the added logistic burden which would be involved, appreciably limit the Chinese Communist capability to undertake operations against all of Indochina.

V. Chinese Communist Probable Courses of Action With Regard to Indochina

Probably the most important factor in a Chinese Communist decision on the question of intervention in Indochina is the current "unfinished business" facing the Chinese Communist regime, including the commitment in Korea, the capture of Formosa, and the bandit suppression campaign. In particular, the heavy Chinese Communist losses in Korea have undoubtedly had a sobering effect on Chinese Communist thinking regarding intervention in Indochina. In view of the partial United States military and industrial mobilization provoked by the Korean war, the Chinese Communists may feel that United Nations' support of the Republic of Korea would be duplicated and that Chinese Communist intervention, even if initially successful, would ultimately fail.

It is believed that the Chinese Communists will continue their military assistance to the Viet Minh on about the same basis as at present. Intervention on a large scale (100,000 troops) is not considered probable at this time. Limited Chinese Communist intervention (on the order of 30,000 troops), in the guise of a joint "Anti-French Volunteer Army," is a probability.

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The customary explanation for the failure of the Chinese Communists to intervene during the past year has been the assumed Viet Minh capability for eventual victory. Unless a serious Viet Minh defeat were in prospect, the U.S.S.R. and the Chinese Communist regime could afford to let the Viet Minh, supported by the Chinese Communist military assistance program, continue the struggle against the French; complicated international questions resulting from Chinese Communist intervention on a large scale would thus be avoided.

On the other hand, the Chinese Communists possibly consider that, because of their failure to achieve a decisive victory in Korea, Asian Communism requires a quick victory elsewhere. The Indochinese situation might be considered suitable, since Viet Minh forces are already strongly testing the capabilities of the French forces. However, because of the strong French military position in Indochina, other areas in Southeast Asia would be more vulnerable.

The corollary to the "compensation" argument mentioned above is that Asian Communism possibly cannot afford a defeat which might be sustained as a result of increasing United States MDAP supplies to the French and the French reinforcements of Indochina. If the French should go over to the offensive and if Viet Minh forces suffer successive defeats or if the Bao Dai Government gained decisive strength in the political field, the Viet Minh might call for Chinese Communist troops to save the situation.

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